

Aleksandra Wagner

SHALE GAS IN THE POLISH MEDIA DISCOURSE

Introduction

The discourse on shale gas in the Polish media actually began in early 2010 (the first two mentions were recorded in late 2009), and held a large amount of the media's attention until the end of 2014.¹ The context of the subject's emergence and development in the media discourse is multifaceted, shaped especially by economic, political and geopolitical factors, but also by historical ones, including those associated with Poland's economic history, and cultural determinants – the sense of national identity, relations with Russia and the United States, but also with the earth and nature, with the traditions shaping the relationship with fossil fuels, ways of thinking about the environment, etc.

Debates on shale gas continued apace at a similar time outside of Poland too. In Germany and the United Kingdom, their scope is national, accompanied by numerous references to the countries' energy policies. A generalised picture of the global discourse based on the media representations of the debates in these countries, as well as the USA and France, therefore seems relevant. Although they are outside the field of interest of many consumers, they serve as a point of reference for the framers of the discourses in the Polish media: politicians, journalists, business leaders and experts. These foreign discourses construct and reproduce both the success story of sorts observed in the USA, and the controversies on hydraulic fracturing (fracking) technologies there and in Europe. Interesting analyses have been conducted

1 At the time of writing, in 2015, shale gas is a practically forgotten subject in the public consciousness. References to the topic appear only occasionally in the media, and the policy statement given by Prime Minister Beata Szydło on 18 November 2015 also ignored it.

on the public discourses in narrative topics related to energy policy in the United Kingdom (Cotton et al. 2014), the dynamic of the media discourse on this subject (Jaspal, Nerlich 2013), and attempts to reconstruct the controversies caused by shale gas in the USA and in the international discourse (Mazur 2014).

Economic conditions

Gas does not occupy a prominent place in the energy use of Poles compared to other energy sources (particularly coal), at around 15% of final energy consumption (GUS 2015). The main consumer of gas in Poland is the industrial sector. Approx. 28% of the gas consumed comes from domestic production, and the remainder is imported, largely from Russia. Poland's dependence on Russian gas stretches back to the 1970s and is connected to the export strategy employed by the Soviet Union at the time. Owing to the current pricing policy of the Russian company Gazprom, the cost of gas for Poland is higher than that for North-Western European countries, such as Germany.

Despite its influence on Poland's relatively low energy dependence level, the domination of coal in the country's energy sector proves to be an economic risk factor owing to the higher costs of energy obtained in this way (as a result of the stipulations of the EU Emission Trading System, in force since 2013). The low degree of diversification of suppliers of coal, gas and oil also creates an additional area of risk: Poland is among the countries with the lowest diversity of energy mix in the EU, although its energy policy undertakes to increase this diversity (EE 2013345).

Poland also continues to have high CO₂ emissions, albeit decreasing steadily since 1998. A concentration on domestic natural gas, regarded as a source of low emissions, is therefore a potential strategy for minimising risks. As mentioned above, Polish energy policy undertakes to diversify the sources of energy acquisition by introducing nuclear energy and increasing the proportion of RES by 2030.

A significant aspect of the discourse on shale gas is the rival economic interests of entities representing various sectors of the energy industry: coal, producers and operators of nuclear reactors and RES infrastructure. The transformations of energy systems can result in threats to some interests and an opportunity for others, consequently enforcing a reconfiguration of the dominant players and verification of their action strategies.

Economic conditions are also affected by the appearance on the Polish market of foreign companies themselves owning concessions, or acting as partners of companies with concessions, to search for shale gas in Poland. A large proportion of these companies withdrew between 2013 and 2015.

Geopolitical conditions

The security of gas supplies to European countries gains significance in the light of the conflict in Ukraine (a transit country for supplies of Russian gas to Poland) as well as Polish-Russian relations. Despite Poland's aforementioned low energy dependence compared to other EU countries – around 30% – this dependence is mainly on Russia. It will be reduced if, as forecast, the proportion of gas in the Polish energy mix increases, making use of domestic gas resources. The prospect of acquisition of unconventional gas is therefore perceived as an opportunity for reduced dependence on Russian raw materials.

The potential exploitation of shale gas would mean closer cooperation with the USA, exchange of experiences, and perhaps also import of technologies and knowhow. This would result in a weakening of Russia's geopolitical position in the region by undermining Gazprom's economic power. The hoped-for strengthening of Poland's geopolitical position as a potential exporter of shale gas is reflected in the future-oriented and wishful tone the country's politicians use in their statements. The factors of economic risk mentioned above can therefore be interpreted in terms of Poland's energy security and independence, opening a path to giving them a status of *raison d'état*.

The political debate on exploring for and exploitation of shale gas taking place in European Union institutions is also related to the strategic interests of individual countries – Germany, France, the United Kingdom – and the political balance of power in both the countries themselves and the European Parliament. This context influences the media discourses of the individual member states. The main dimensions of the overlapping geopolitical and economic references in the Polish media discourses are illustrated in Figure 1.

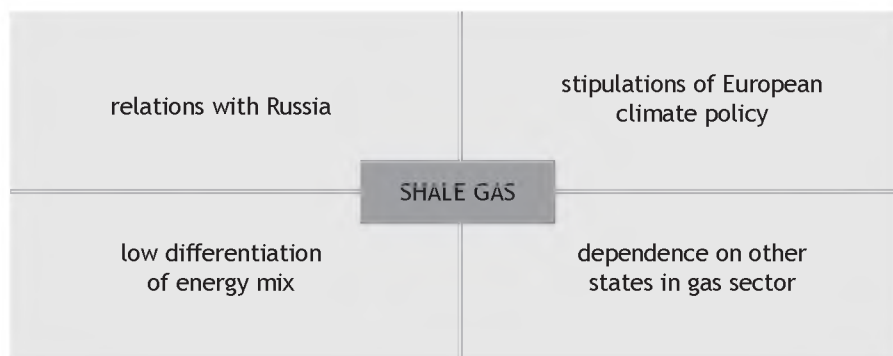


Figure 1. Outline of geopolitical and economic references

Source: own elaboration.

Political conditions

The political balance of power provides a significant reference point for the analysed media discourse on shale gas mostly because of the model of the public sphere in Poland, which we assume to be close to the model of a representative liberal democracy (Ferree et al. 2002). As an ideal type, this model is based on the principles of representativeness, transparency and proportionality. It is based on rational discourse with a privileged position for symbolic elites. We can therefore assume that it is the representatives of these elites – politicians, experts and journalists – who will be most visible and permitted to speak most often in the public sphere. In accordance with the principle of proportionality in the media discourse, the largest political parties and NGOs will also be represented in the media discourse. We can therefore expect the media discourse sphere to become one set aside for presenting positions on shale gas, making and justifying proposals, and explaining decisions to consumers in a rational manner based on respect for opposing points of view.

In the period of analysis, the political scene was generally divided between the two largest parties – Civic Platform (PO), centrist, defining itself as liberal, in power between 2007 and autumn 2015, and the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party, in opposition throughout this time. In the initial phase, i.e. 2010, both parties expressed enthusiastic support for the shale gas project, viewing it as offering economic and geopolitical opportunities for Poland. The opposition became increasingly vocal in its criticism, but this concerned the

government's sluggishness in executing the project rather than disapproval of its premises. The other parties – the Polish People's Party, representing above all farmers, and the Democratic Left Alliance – did not take up a position opposing utilisation of shale gas in Poland. They neither introduced the concerns voiced by environmental organisations to the media discourse nor supported the protests of the population living in the areas where exploration was taking place, although individual politicians did speak out against the heavy-handed policies of corporations towards local communities and the failure to abide by the principles of social dialogue.

The parliamentary elections of 2011 led to frequent references of politicians to shale gas concerning energy security and economic development. Visions of the future emphasising the potential benefits figure among political parties' propaganda statements, with the optimistic visions of a prosperous future that go with them helping to secure political capital. After the 2011 elections, Prime Minister Donald Tusk included the subject of shale gas in his policy statement, while the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) report naming the errors and oversights in the legislative processes and administration of the shale gas project and the withdrawal of the largest companies from explorations for gas in Poland meant that the issue lost its political attractiveness.

The next dimension of the political context is questions of legislation. Both the exploration and extraction of shale gas in Poland take place on the basis of concessions awarded by the Ministry of the Environment. On 1 September 2015 there were 40 active concessions, issued to ten Polish and foreign licence-holders (Ministry of the Environment data), on 70 appraisal wells.

The explorations and potential exploitation were initially regulated by the Geology and Mining Law of 4 February 1994, amended by the Geology and Mining Law of 9 June 2011 (GML2011), and then adjusted by the Act of 11 July 2014 on a change to the Geology and Mining Law and several other laws. The form of the legal solutions foreseen in GML2011 is affected by EU legislation in areas associated with awarding concessions for exploring for hydrocarbons as well as environmental protection. Fiscal issues are also governed by the Act of 25 July 2014 on a special hydrocarbon tax.

The previous lack of detailed regulations, as well as the work required to prepare and then announce them, are an important aspect of the context of the public sphere, related to the media discourse forming around shale gas.

Media discourses in the USA and European countries

The media discourses that have developed in other countries are not self-contained, but, like the Polish one, entrenched in the social, political and cultural conditions of their own systems of reference. Their peculiar materialisations in the form of a set of media statements, mutual references, repetitions, omissions and interpretations constitute an intertextual external context, a space in which the symbols, iconic representations, metaphors and labels that affect communication in the Polish media are formed – even though it is sometimes hard to recognise direct allusions to them. In the age of globalisation, the internet and social media, these contents are widely accessible, and can both be a point of reference to the discourses of specific groups and find their reflection, often somewhat transformed, in the public sphere.

For obvious reasons, it would be difficult to describe the extent and complexity of this discursive sphere at length. From the point of view of analysis of the Polish shale gas discourse, however, two of its dimensions stand out: first, the discourse creating an optimistic vision of the spectacular economic success of shale gas extraction in the USA, and second, the area constructing and reproducing controversies on fracking technologies present in the USA and other European countries. These controversies are expressed in the form of various narrative strategies by diverse groups of actors and actants which form something like dispersed epistemic communities that can be studied through the discourses revealing the resources of knowledge and power rooted in the language, as well as contexts and organisational structures (Cotton et al. 2014).

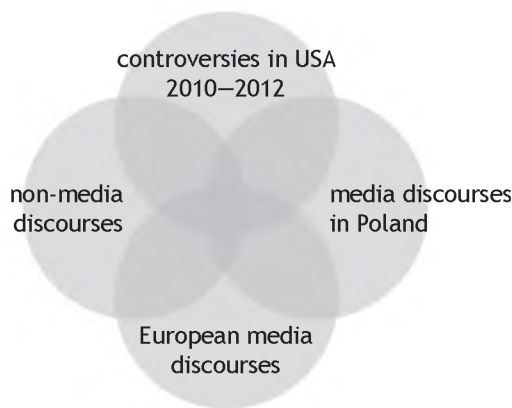


Figure 2. Media discourses in the setting of the Polish media discourse
Source: own elaboration.

It is important to note that the areas divided in this way are not internally uniform, and are constructed by diverse sources using various logic and semantics and with different objectives. These vary from expert, technological, environmental and economic discourses to political ones, and even the products of popular culture. Among the latter are John Fox's renowned film *Gasland*, which is critical of shale gas extraction, illustrating the social consequences of extracting unconventional hydrocarbons in the USA, and a production that is something of a response to it, *FrackNation*, directed by Magdalena Segieda, Phelim McAleer and Ann McElhinney. In the discourses on public policies these slot into argumentative coalitions and oppositions, which can be positioned on discursive maps of the public sphere.

The main axis of division in international discourses runs between the proponents of shale gas, who underline its beneficial impact on the economy and/or climate policy (low emissions), and its opponents, who highlight pollution of groundwater, methane emission, increased risk of seismic activity, and contamination of land. A major part in the controversies is played by areas of uncertainty and ignorance concerning fracking, as well as disagreement on its role in energy transformation. The depictions of shale gas in the narratives vary from the view of it as an ideal technology, via those that regard it as a transition on the road to "clean" energy, to the conviction that shale gas technologies block the development of alternative energy forms, profoundly contradicting the idea of energy transformation and sustaining the order based on fossil fuels.

Allan Mazur analyses the role of the media in creating these controversies in his article "How Did the Fracking Controversy Emerge in the Period 2010–2012," noting the major role played by the media in forming perceptions of a given technology and its consequences for political decisions (Mazur 2014). The sensitivity of policy makers to questions of social approval therefore additionally increases the economic risk involved in investments, which is often the key (and even only) reason for investors to engage in social dialogue. Research on the media discourse regarding shale gas demonstrates the important role played by these investors in shaping the social representatives of this source of energy and the associated technology (cf. Jaspal, Nerlich 2013; Jaspal et al. 2014) and the roles and significance of media discourse for the prospects of social dialogue and transformation of energy policy (Upham et al. 2015; Wagner 2014; Wagner et al. 2016).

The dynamic of the Polish shale gas discourse

Shale gas appeared as a topic in the Polish media discourse in late 2009, as a result of the public announcement of estimates of Poland's shale gas resources made by Advance Resources International and Wood Mackenzie in 2009. The subject remained firmly in the media attention in subsequent years, featuring prominently in the public discourse on energy issues. Apart from nuclear energy questions, it has been the most frequently tackled energy topic in recent years. The largest increase in contents published on shale gas issues can be observed in 2011.

The dynamic of this discourse is connected to the political and economic activity of its leading actors. The initially optimistic approach that accompanied the exploration phase slowly gave way to slightly more critical appraisal, largely as a result of the succession of companies withdrawing from Poland. The media discourse in 2010–2011 was characterised by optimism regarding shale gas, and politicians' pre-election activity was conducive to building optimistic visions of the future. Shale gas was mostly described in terms of opportunities and possibilities, which corresponded with political decision makers' outlook on the shale gas project (Johnson, Boersma 2013). These observations on the media discourse from this period are also corroborated by the interim research of press discourse conducted independently by various researchers (e.g. Jaspal et al. 2014; Wagner 2014). The initial enthusiasm was followed by a period of confrontation with the realities of operational explorations. Criticism mounted regarding the government's actions, and especially the incompetence of officials and the slow legislative process. A significant event in this phase of development of the discourse came in January 2014, with the publication of the NIK report criticising the actions of businesses and the administration concerning exploration for shale gas in Poland. The tone and character of the media discourse was also affected by further reports of withdrawal of significant market players from the project of shale gas extraction in Poland. In March 2014 the media also showed interest, when the government enacted the law regulating extraction of shale gas.

This period can be defined as a wave of moderate criticism compared to the previously aroused hopes, then disappointment, and finally a decline in interest in shale gas in the Polish media, temporarily revived by the political event of the passing of the law. Essentially, however, in this period the popularity of shale gas gave way to the topic of the construction of a nuclear power station. The most significant events in the shale gas media discourse can be illustrated in the form of a timeline (see Figure 3).

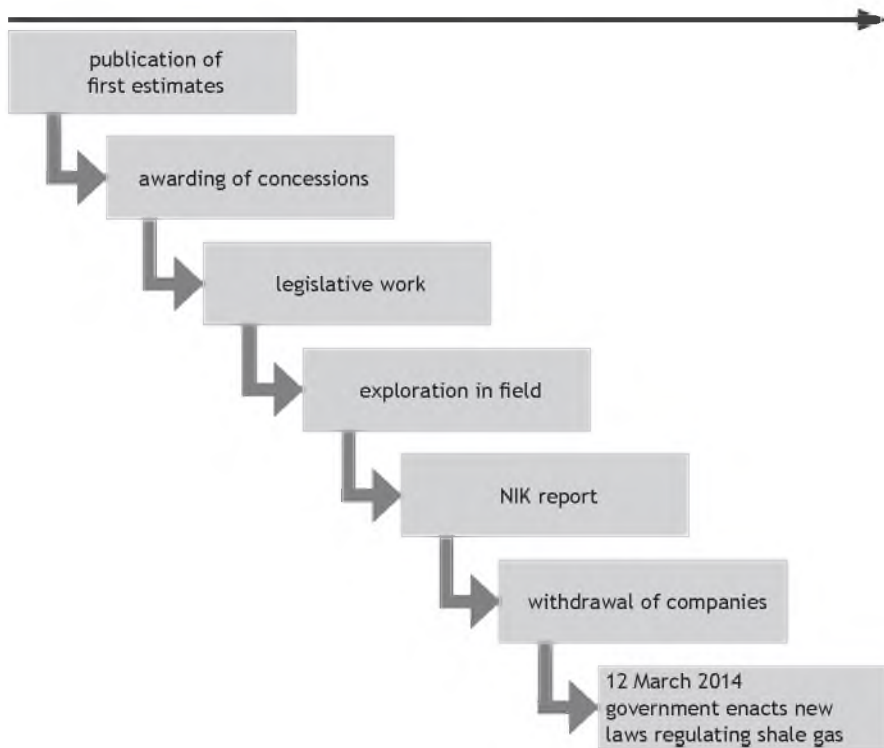


Figure 3. Communicative events in the media determining the dynamic of the shale gas discourse until 2014

Source: own elaboration.

In the next phases of development of the discourse we can observe dynamic changes to particular aspects of the situation – communications of the actors in the discourse, mobilised resources, argumentative strategies and the resultant discursive constructions.

Shale gas as a discursive construct

The issue of shale gas has been accompanied by a degree of ambivalence from the outset: on the one hand, it is mostly described as a resource, and as such as anchored in social knowledge by the following concepts: deposit, asset, resource, land, nature, and even treasure. In this context, even when it is exploitation that is being discussed, it does not command attention itself, but

rather is treated instrumentally, from the perspective of optimisation of the extraction process. This optimisation is understood economically, in terms of profitability, gain, and economic risk. However, this way of speaking about shale gas places a strong emphasis on links to national identity, and patriotism in the context of energy independence from Russia. Rusi Jaspal, Brigitte Nerlich and Szczepan Lemańczyk (2014) explain this way of constructing the social representation of shale gas by referring to the construction of identity vis-à-vis the Other (here Russia), perceived as a threat. The crisis in Ukraine only focuses this perception of Russia even more sharply. Extraction of shale gas becomes a chance for independence, something which gains the status of *raison d'état* in light of Poland's strained relations with Moscow. This opens the field of construction of social representation of shale gas with reference to the level of macropolitics and macroeconomics. Questions of social support and residents'/citizens' perception of the issues are only reflected in an aggregate form, as the results of surveys probing the level of declared support for realisation of shale gas projects in Poland. Reports of social protests (e.g. the case of Żurawłów²) are presented solely as local issues concerning a small number of residents, although with this comes a narrative constructed around the figures of a strong, evil corporation and the heroic civic resistance from those who are far weaker, but acting for a good cause.

The second type of discussion on shale gas emphasises not so much the resources as the technologies used for extracting them. This discourse covers hydraulic fracking, and is characterised by greater controversy: from arguments that it is harmless, and even beneficial to the objectives of climate policy, to harsh criticism of fracking as an untested technology with potential harmful effects for the environment and human health. The latter topic, developed by environmental organisations, is considerably less visible in the media, however.

The three areas indicated by the keywords with the highest frequency in the analysed discourse – nature, economy, politics – therefore result in various semantic constructions: shale gas as a resource, an asset, a treasure (here there is a clear predominance of positive connotations: opportunity, asset, hope), as well as perceived through the lens of fracking. The latter representation is not unequivocally positive, but rather more clearly linked to areas of uncertainty and risk, often described as controversial, although the controversies themselves are seldom articulated in the media discourse.

Although for years the main subject connected to shale gas has been its extraction – the prospects for profitable exploitation and distribution, the

2 Żurawłów is a village in Lublin Voivodeship which became the site of a protest of residents lasting more than a year against Chevron and its plans to search for and utilise shale gas in the area.



Figure 4. Nonhuman factors shaping the discursive representations of shale gas

Source: own elaboration.

associated barriers, regulations etc. – it is the first way of discussing the topic that has been the dominant one. The media frequently describe shale gas as being a controversial issue, but these controversies are not reflected in the mainstream media: either in the opinion polls they cite, in which Poles declare almost unanimous support for the shale gas project, or in their own standpoints. The “controversial” label is in fact perhaps more of a reflection of the discourses taking place abroad, which raise the issue of the harmfulness of hydraulic fracturing and the new, untested technology, and are characterised by a much more diverse spectrum of viewpoints.

To sum up, shale gas in Poland is for the most part discussed in terms rather of valuable resources than of the extraction technology (fracking). The main participants in the discourse are politicians and economic experts, referring to the macro level – geopolitics and the state economy. The construction of the law that they employ treats it as a resource making it possible to realise the (economic, political) actions of the system. The intensifying criticism of the state administration in the second phase of the discourse concerns the slow pace of legislative actions from the point of view of economic entities, and the complex procedures that hinder enterprises in realisation of their investments. As a result, the law figures in the discourse less often as a guarantee of justice (including fair use of natural resources) and protection of people in relatively weaker social positions, instead being treated instrumentally as a tool for realising specific interests – in this case as a barrier to commencing exploration and extraction processes. Politicians respond to this criticism by announcing acceleration of the legislative process and simplification of procedures, to act as an incentive for investors. In this context, discussions of potential protection of the environment or of the interests of the local population are much rarer. The concept of justice as objectivity that lies at the foundation of deliberation, and in particular the principle of protection of the positions of the weakest groups in a social order, is acutely marginalised here.

Language

The actors featuring in the discourse generally have a positive view of the question of exploitation of gas. In the first phase, this is the dominant tone of the media representations, which position these topics as a big issue, a matter of prime importance. The language used in the press also expresses this – Poland is often called a “gas Eldorado,” and the exploration for shale gas a “valuable, one-off opportunity,” “which might not happen again,” “the greatest hope for Polish energy.” Shale gas is also “excellent business,” the “most important subject,” something that “will become the driving force of our economy.” The experiences of other countries are often cited by way of comparison, especially the USA and Norway, which made large economic gains after the discovery of energy raw materials. Description of the recent past therefore becomes the foundation for building a vision of the future:

Although the Ernst&Young report concerns the past, it also draws conclusions on the future. The main one is that, following the American example, more countries with shale gas deposits will seek to increase extraction, becoming independent from external supplies. Countries equipped with the most unconventional deposits could be especially active in this respect. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 17 December 2012)

The positive image of shale gas is also affected by the idea that it is profitable (“it will be possible to earn good money from shale gas”), but in particular by the perception of it in the context of energy independence from Russia. Sceptical voices tend to express caution, pointing not so much to the dangers as to the areas of risk resulting from failure of the enterprise (insufficient resources, impossibility of exploitation). No direct proponent–opponent conflict line concerning shale gas exploitation in Poland is evident. In symbolic terms, then, shale gas is associated with the chance for independence from Russia and freedom (“freedom smells of gas,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 25 July 2012). As time goes on, the statements become more direct, especially in the context of the Ukraine crisis: “The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has demonstrated irrefutably that Poland must become energy-independent from gas supplies from the East. Shale gas deposits are what give the chance to do so” (*Dziennik Bałtycki*, 12 March 2014).

In the process of construction of the media representation of shale gas, allusions to the myth of the gold rush (or “gold fever,” as it is called in Polish) also play a significant role. The symbolism that follows this not only places hopes and enthusiasm in the semantic field of shale gas, but also reinforces the positive perception of the resource as something valuable and unique (“shale gas fever,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24 March 2012; “Poland the second Norway,” *Polityka*, 18 January 2012).

In the following years, despite the decline in general enthusiasm and criticism of the government's actions, the positive perception of shale gas persisted:

"I think that our natural resources can be an even stronger stimulus for development of the country, and I believe that acceleration, which is most important for me, of extraction of unconventional gas from shale is what is, and will be, the priority for me," Grabowski declared. (Polish Radio 1, 20 November 2013)

The increasing criticism concerning actions involving the shale gas extraction project, as opposed to be extraction itself, treated the circumstances as a reason for concern.

Since the beginning of the year, further blows have rained down on the Polish shale gas exploration programme. The NIK report presented last week is scathing, pointing to officials' incompetence, the danger of corruption and the lack of legal basis. The latest foreign investor, ENI, has begun to withdraw from Poland, having lost two (of its three) concessions for shale gas exploration. On top of this worrying news comes the alarmingly low number of shale gas exploration wells. (*Dziennik Polski*, 16 January 2014)

The shale gas discourse is future-oriented – the future presented usually takes the forms of:

- Planned actions
- Estimates concerning resources, prices, potential inflow of extracted gas onto the energy markets
- Far-reaching visions of development of Poland and the geopolitical situation.

The statements take the form of forecasts running to the near (from a year to one or two decades) or, less often, more distant future (several decades or centuries). The former are dominant, with precise times given, e.g.:

The breakthrough will take place in 2016, when the USA and Canada will commence exporting LNG on a large scale, according to Sbierbank. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22 May 2012)

"The investments in energy begun now will in 2020 lead to a situation in which Poland could have an excess of its own energy," said Treasury Minister Mikołaj Budzanowski recently. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 31 October 2012)

The visions of the future presented above also vary in their modality (indicating the speaker's degree of certainty that the forecast would come true). Some sentences appear that affirm the assumed state of affairs:

Gas will come from shale in 2014. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 27 March 2012)

The first wells for exploring for shale gas in Poland have been made. Prime Minister Tusk predicts a real abundance. (*Polityka*, 1 June 2011)

Or in a somewhat less categorical form:

[...] there is much to suggest that 2013 will be a breakthrough year – in every measure: global, European, Polish, financial, social and geopolitical. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 29 December 2012)

There will also probably be a breakthrough in the energy market. In 2013 development of shale gas will be accelerated on a global scale, and this new trend might change the global balance of power within a decade. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 29 December 2012)

Some sentences refer to the future actions planned at present:

By the end of the year, exploratory work is due to be completed or to start at 29 sites. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 6 August 2012)

Others can be classified as wishful thinking. The visions of the future they present, based on estimated data, encompass a time frame even of several centuries, for example:

300 years – this is how long shale gas resources in Poland are estimated to last. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 10 October 2011)

The scenarios that are presented are conditional, dependent above all on discovery of shale gas in Poland and confirmation of the profitability of its extraction. These two fundamental conditions delineate the main areas of risk conceptualised in the press discourse. Yet both can essentially only be verified by practical action. There is therefore a need to act, and permit exploration and exploitation attempts, in order to assess their effectiveness. The potential negative effects of these actions are not discussed.

Social worlds and arenas

Krzysztof Konecki (2010), following the ideas of Paul G. Cressey, describes “social worlds” from the point of view of the actions around which these worlds are formed. They arrange a physical and symbolic space for themselves, and within them norms develop, subjected to action, as well as a particular division of work. The main action is accompanied by auxiliary ones. In public communication, social worlds will therefore be a reflection and measure of socially existing worlds, while the media discourse space will become an additional measure of their creation and reproduction. We will henceforth understand arenas as scenes constructed in media statements, in which events are presented and actors operate. They are a space of the conflict going on within the social world, and can be the nucleus of creation of a new sub-discourse (Konecki 2010). They become part of the perspective of a specific area of social life (e.g. politics, economics, science,

and, in the case of lifeworld, work, family, recreation, habits and individual likes) that is dominant in a given extract.

In keeping with the trends anticipated by the presence of collective and individual actors, the world of economics and politics are dominant. Also present, but with less exposure, is the world based on the perspective of environmental protection, as well as the marginal lifeworld, incorporating the perspective of “everyday life,” of so-called ordinary people.

The dominant meanings of the world of economics are subordinated to the perspective of profit, expressed in terms of making money, costs, prices, the market etc. The world of the market and economics is complemented by a variously characterised economic-political perspective. In the latter case, the perspective of profit is linked with an orientation towards reproduction of power. Costs, supply and demand therefore become tools or effects of political actions. The two first perspectives encompass the entire spectrum of systemic presentation of shale gas – on the one hand in the light of the potential gains, investments and necessary expenditure, and on the other in the context of independence from other states (mostly Russia), possible alliances and cooperation (mostly with the USA) and strengthened position in the political balance of power in the domestic (parliamentary elections) and international arena (within the EU). This world also has a political-administrative dimension, being subject to the principle of efficient organisation of systemic actions, and thus legal regulations, administrative control and ensuring security. This is the world of the state. The separate world of environmentalists, whose horizon is marked by an orientation towards environmentally friendly activities, including preserving natural resources where possible in an untouched state for future generations, is weakly represented in the media discourse. Yet it is not an invisible or unnamed world. It is named, not by its own representatives, but by politicians, business representatives and journalists in external roles, who speak of the efforts, actions and logic of “ecologists.” We therefore find slivers of this world in the media discourse, but they seldom set the dominant atmosphere of the text or programme, instead appearing as additional arguments accompanying other perspectives.

The main arena in which various ways of interpreting shale gas can meet is the battlefield of economic and political interests. The latter involve reproduction of power through controlling the situation, including strategic goods. Elements of the environmental discourse, focused on protection of nature, intergenerational solidarity and the perspective of sustainable development, occupy marginal places here, and are non-existent in the main, central part. This has consequences for the nature of the conflicts that are played out, which do not include the dispute over the safety of fracking technologies for the environment. Something that we can observe is the efforts made by

actors of the environmental world to enter the economic and political arena – in both cases without significant results. For example, the representatives of environmental organisations emphasised the financial expenditure associated with the realisation of the shale gas project as a factor hindering the development of RES (lack of funds to subsidise this sector), and Greenpeace launched an offensive timed to coincide with the UN climate summit in Warsaw. This is an important narrative, however, as it directly concerns questions of energy policy and of setting its priorities, as well as – although this is not articulated directly – certain moral assumptions of which sources of energy are good. This strategy is based on the metaphorical opposition of “dirty” and “clean” energy sources noted in external discourses (Cotton et al. 2014). Yet the media do not give much attention to the issues highlighted within this, such as the pollution of water and methane emissions, and the media discourse fails to develop them. The actors of worlds marginalised in the discourse therefore endeavour to increase their visibility in the public sphere, not always successfully. The main problem is doing battle in the economic arena, in which a unique weaponry applies: vocabulary associated with profit, money, growth and economic development. In the material we analysed, we found no attempts to introduce a new semantics based on alternative lexica.

The world of extraction technologies, engineers and geologists is also only lightly sketched, and not clearly articulated in the mainstream media. The key actions for this world appear as key words, as the problems or possibilities of extraction. Its actors, symbolic determinants and resources are seldom cited in the discourse, and do not form their own symbolic space. The lifeworlds of the residents of potential sites for exploration, or the world of the everyday lives of inhabitants of Poland in general, in which individuals’ beliefs, approaches and emotions would find their place, is an unknown space. The residents or local communities cited in the discourse tend to be treated as passive addressees of actions rather than active agents. The few statements that refer to social protests provide us with a partial, one-dimensional picture of this world. These are essentially solitary islands in a sea of opinion polls expressing aggregative support for shale gas investments. The perspective of the everyday, norms and values with a bearing on the perception of energy issues is in fact non-existent in the press we analysed. Topics problematising the industrialisation of rural areas (as a consequence of shale gas extraction) also do not appear, and the narrative observed in the United Kingdom, of the uneven distribution of risk and the expected benefits, appears marginally in the form of a story about a gargantuan, avaricious corporation and desperate, weaker farmers, in the few materials that describe the conflict between the residents of Żurawłów and Chevron.

Both the lifeworld and the world of technology are characterised by certain processes that serve to develop the technologies or perspectives of

residents through hegemonic worlds – that of economics and politics. This phenomenon can be described using the concept of colonialisation of the lifeworld, in a sense also the world of technology, as a world of practical possibilities, by power and money, i.e. the aforementioned hegemonic worlds of the state and economy.

Actors

Our analysis methodology distinguished socially individual actors (people) and collective ones (organisations, groups), as well as primary and background actors. Primary actors are those who play active roles in the discourse, are quoted (press, internet) or directly presented (radio, TV), have the chance to state their views independently, take a standpoint, and make independent use of symbolic resources. Background actors, on the other hand, are those cited by others, appearing in absentia, so to speak. Positions and resources are attributed to them, as they become a point of reference for other contributors. Background actors sometimes speak independently – their statements are presented – but these appearances serve to illustrate information (e.g. shots showing protesting members of local communities).

In a quantitative sense, collective actors dominate individual actors. Though there are more of them, however, they are usually background figures. Economic organisations predominate here: companies and enterprises, including Polish – PGNiG, Tauron, Energa – and foreign ones – Gazprom, Areva, Chevron. Alongside them we observe such institutions as the stock exchange, banks, and financial and energy markets. As for the major individual actors, these are domestic politicians – initially, Prime Minister Donald Tusk was very active, joined increasingly by the ministers of the economy and – after the change in this position in 2013 – the minister of the environment.

The main background actors to join these domestic politicians are other countries, whose leaders are mentioned as synonymous terms for state organisms (Poland, but also Merkel, Putin, Obama, Germany, Russia, USA). The media visibility of scientific and research institutes is insignificant. They neither publish their own views on the shale gas project, nor give their verdict on expert opinions or reports that appear, with the exception of the first estimates concerning resources of Polish deposits. The Polish Geological Institute (PGI) and the Energy Information Agency (EIA) both figure in the discourse, but much less frequently than the aforementioned economic institutions. Experts are an important category of actors, as they prove to be active. Expert status is defined either explicitly, where a journalist presents the individu-

al's role as such, or by reference to the specialist knowledge. Experts in the shale gas discourse are mostly actors of the world of economics, and usually employees of consulting companies, businesses and think tanks or business analysts, rather than engineers or geologists working in R&D departments. There are a few appearances in the discourse of environmentalists or representatives of the social sciences. Universities do not operate as a notable place of generation of important knowledge or as an institution legitimising the actions taken in the world of economics or politics. In comparison with the discourse concerning nuclear energy, we can observe a migration of knowledge from the traditional centres of its generation (academic research and theoretical institutions) towards the economic system (businesses' analysis departments, company laboratories, consulting agencies). Hybrid institutions symbolically located somewhere between the system of science and those of economics and politics – think tanks, science-business consortia, etc. – are also being formed. This observation is consistent with Nico Stehr's (2012) definition of knowledge as the foundation of taking actions (as opposed to information, which constitutes a resource not necessarily connected to an actor's actions). However, economics does not seek knowledge beyond its own world, but rather generates and obtains it in its own scope and for its own use. We should note that the discursive map of energy issues has certain blank spaces. Above all, there is no local community, residents, and citizens in a broader sense. The representatives of the local community generally function in the roles of passive actors, addressees of actions, and constructs used as points of reference in the statements of politicians and experts. There is also a weak showing from representatives of the third sector, limited to selected environmental organisation and two civic institutes (Sobieski Institute, Kościuszko Institute).

From the first phase of development of the discourse, a certain order of dominant actors began to form, which did not change substantially in the subsequent period. Using the similarity map (Figure 5), we can clearly reveal the links between codes within one cluster. Evident here are mutual links between economic and political institutions taking an economic perspective, i.e. employing the criterion of profitability and the language of profits and costs. We see a strong connection between experts and the institutions forming the economic system, as well as with the state and politicians. The field of influence also includes the media with weak links to the first sector, as well as slightly more distant political institutions and informal groups (and then residents and the local community).

The press analyses we conducted demonstrate minimal differences between the various publications when it comes to the exposure of the individual categories of actors. Three categories are dominant: politicians, experts and representatives of business.

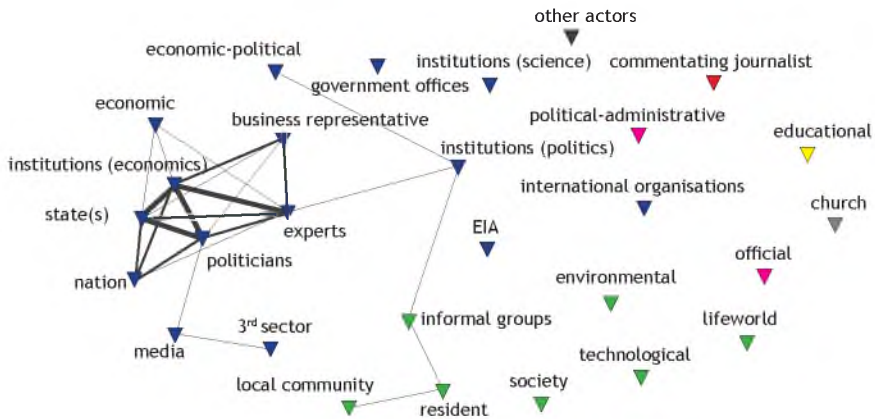


Figure 5. Links between codes in the discourse 2009–2012

Source: own elaboration.



Figure 6. Actors and actants of the shale gas discourse 2013–2014

Source: own elaboration.

In the collective actors category, there is also a lack of fundamental differences from a synchronic (publications) and diachronic (years) point of view. The main categories are still states and economic institutions. Subtle differences can be found between the national and local media. In the latter, local government politicians appear somewhat more frequently.

As noted above, there are blank spaces in the reconstructed discursive map. Above all, there is no local community, residents, or also citizens in a broader sense. Where the representatives of the local community do appear,

they generally function as passive actors, addressees of actions, constructs used as a point of reference in the statements of politicians and experts.

The exposure of representatives of the third sector is also relatively weak, confined to selected environmental organisations (Greenpeace, Green Institute) and two civic institutes (Sobieski Institute, Kościuszko Institute). They are therefore unable to share their perspectives and positions in the arena, which means that this dimension of conflict is not articulated in the public space.

Conflicts played out in arenas

In the discursive arenas, we therefore observe a crossing of the interests of actors, especially political and economic ones. Experts are placed in the role of adherents of the conflicting sides. The conflict of interest concerning the economic actors representing the industry interested in exploitation of shale gas is mostly about distribution of the expected profits between the enterprise and the state – which is expressed in the discussion of tax issues.

The subject of shale gas in the media discourse shows a clear tendency towards representations using binary oppositions. The shale gas–coal opposition, along with the associated energy models, proves to be fundamental here. Oppositions are also invoked in the media discourse, however, in the form of negation.

The second of the strong oppositions is the representation of the EU's climate policy as incompatible with Poland's economic interests. The axis of tension between various orientations concerning energy policy – the position considering protection of the environment and climate, and that which prioritises industrial development – runs between the European Union and the Polish government and the investors and experts in coalition with it. Owing to the weak visibility of other actors (ENGOS, scientists, social activists), it is EU climate policy that occupies the indicated counter-position. It is worth noting, however, that the EU position that is cited appears in terms of technicised legal instruments – questions of emissions, requirements for obtaining environmental decisions etc. There is no discussion on its axio-normative foundations or strategic objectives.

The third opposition is that of Poland, as well as the EU and the West, with the Russian company Gazprom, which is identified with Russia's expansive policy. This dimension mainly corresponds to the politicisation of the issue of shale gas extraction. Gazprom is perceived as the chief antagonist of shale gas, and the relatively rarely recorded protests of environmentalists meet with commentary on the implicit connections with Gazprom and its stimulation of adverse presentation of shale gas.

An opposing voice observed in the discourse is *Gasland*. The occasional comments of the local community refer to the film, and experts and business representatives also assume a position towards it, disavowing the image it presents of the negative environmental effects of shale gas.

The conflicts outlined are played out within the arenas of the economic, political and social worlds. Each defines the roles separately, as well as equipping their actors with slightly different symbolic resources.

Among the main conflicts is that between Gazprom and the allied forces of Polish and American companies. At stake is Russian domination on the European market, with the conflict going beyond a strictly economic dimension to touch upon geopolitical spheres of influence. Gazprom assumes the form of a negative protagonist endangering other participants of the energy markets. This demonic image of Gazprom is also referred to by those who question it:

This is the most fantastical part of the myth, but it is so attractive that it has already inspired sensational novels. The cover of Zbigniew Machowski's *Greed is Good*, the first shale-gas novel, features the question, "Will Russia seize Polish gas deposits?". (*Polityka*, 18 January 2012)

The conflict between Gazprom, represented by Russia, and the Western world, is also played out in a strictly political dimension:

The final victory of the Russian authorities will take place if we do not reach agreement on shale gas in Poland. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 26 November 2012)

It is often accompanied by military metaphors:

The agreement on shale gas does not mean that we will win the battle for exploitation of this raw material (the opposition, meaning the Russians and the Western renewable energy lobby, are still strong and will not give up). (*Rzeczpospolita*, 27 September 2011)

The Russians' irritation was triggered by the assault of American concerns seeking shale gas in Poland, which Gazprom treats as its own sphere of influence. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 14 June 2010)

This year's Wrocław Global Forum, which took place on 9–11 June, was largely devoted to questions of freedom and democracy, as well as energy and raw materials. Although this seems like a backbreaking combination, it is unsurprising given the consistency with which the Kremlin uses gas and oil to manipulate its upstart neighbours and the huge scale on which China is exploring Africa and South America to search for strategic raw material deposits. (*Wprost*, 20 June 2011)

The political conflict is also played out on the EU scene, between the proponents and opponents of shale gas exploitation.

France does not agree to shale gas exploitation and is in favour of its prohibition in the whole European Union. This is contradictory to Polish interests. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 16 November 2012)

A simultaneous juxtaposition is “coal versus shale gas” or “nuclear versus shale gas.” Here, the various energy technologies are treated as alternative, and therefore rivals.

Will nuclear energy not tolerate shale gas in Poland? (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 October 2012)

The problem is that we do not have enough money to build a nuclear power station and search for shale gas using technology we do not yet possess and in which the Minister of the Treasury told state companies to invest. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 31 October 2012)

Less confrontational voices also appear in the discourse, calling for diversification of the technologies employed. These, however, are often articulated as wishful thinking, alongside the discussed presentation, which is clearly present and contained implicitly in the press articles.

I believe that the wealth of Pomerania will be based on energy and raw materials. It is not just shale gas and nuclear energy. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 November 2011)

The social discourse is only hinted at in the discourse, without extensive discussion of the causes and determinants. The conflict is only noted in this arena, while at the same time it is played out beyond the main media representations.

The Kashubians versus shale gas. Protests in Pomerania against shale gas exploration. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 12 October 2012)

To an extent simultaneously with the political and economic discourse – dominant in the press and on radio and television – in the field of social media, popular culture, and also individual commentaries, conflicts are played out between local communities and their representatives – activists, environmental organisations and farmers – and big corporate business. The positions of participants in the dispute are presented as asymmetrical in terms of power and influences, which are shown as sources of oppression. The role of corporations portrayed here is decidedly negative, and their economic interest is contrasted not so much with individual interests as with autotelic values: justice, human decency, and respect for nature.

In short: I prefer for a thousand Polish peasants to live in a clean environment than for five shareholders of an enormous corporation to change their wood on board their yachts to a more refined one (because these are the objectives for which enormous corporations usually exist). And I also don't like it when the big guy kicks the little guy, because how else can you describe Chevron's lawsuit against 13 rather randomly selected farmers out of 150 protestors?

Although this kind of conflict seldom appears in the arenas constructed in the media discourse, to an extent it develops independently from the mainstream, mostly reaching the consumers associated with this world.

The presentation of arguments, portrayal and reference to values brings it closer to the perspective of residents' everyday lives than the political and economic discourse, which refer to macro-problems. Moreover, it makes use of evocative and communicatively strong means of expression – for example, on YouTube one can watch numerous films illustrating burning water coming out of a tap (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LBjSXWQVR8>, access 29 September 2014, views: 1,635,516).

Arena or agora?

In the background of the conflict axes illustrated here, so to speak, we can find numerous (albeit disparate) topics on cooperation. Most are proposals referring to economic collaboration, but taking the political consequences into account. Poland's main partner identified in the analysed articles is the United States, followed by Canada.

"American companies have a large financial potential, and we know that explorations come with a certain risk. This is why such collaboration is important for PGNiG," he adds. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 27 August 2010)

For now Orlen is funding its shale gas exploration itself. However, it is speaking to the companies with the experience and technology required to extract gas from shale deposits and who might be interested in joint projects. This is hardly surprising – a well costs several million dollars, so it makes sense to share costs with companies that have hundreds of such wells behind them. The natural partners for such collaboration are companies whose concession territory borders with Orlen's, so ExxonMobil, Chevron and Encana, for example. (*Wprost*, 6 September 2010)

Geofizyka has decided to take the opportunity, and boasts the position of leader of the domestic search for unconventional deposits of natural gas. It is working with the concerns PGNiG, ExxonMobil, Chevron, ConocoPhillips and Aurelian. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8 December 2012)

This cooperation space, however, concerns business and administrative partners; there are no efforts to construct a plane of common actions for a larger number of stakeholders, such as local governments, state power, business, NGOs, research centres and the local population. There is no attempted empowerment of citizens, by making actors from outside politics and economics additional stakeholders discussing the problem of shale gas, allowing them to add to the discourse the perspective of sustained development, and thus quality of life, health issues and protection of the environment, understood as a common good. The emotions incorporated in the discourse are managed ideologically, and these include extreme emotions: from enthusiasm and na-

tional pride, supporting visions of successful exploitation, to fear, frustration and anger, from which perspective positions opposing the exploration and exploitation of shale deposits in Poland are perceived. We should also note here that it is not cognitively legitimate to attribute these negative emotions to lack of knowledge, as ignorance is also connected in the discourse with positions in support of shale gas, and actors even use it strategically (cf. Wagner 2014).

Actors in the discourse make use of various types of symbolic resources which they cite or attribute to other actors, constructing their positions and argumentative strategies. Among the main ones are resources of knowledge and ignorance, from which the understanding and definition of risk often result, but they also include the law, norms and values, and power and economic capital possessed.

Although shale gas can be, and is, viewed in terms of technological innovations (Stankiewicz 2013), and as a result one might expect the discourse to include attempts to construct a corpus of shared knowledge on the subject and a process of distribution of this knowledge featuring experts and decision makers, in fact the media discourse in Poland is constructed on a peculiar ignorance, and moreover one that in certain areas is strategic (Wagner 2014). Rather than extreme oppositions, knowledge and ignorance function in the discourse rather as ends of the same continuum. Knowledge here is defined as a process at the basis of the actions taken by social actors (Gross 2012). One might expect knowledge to give the opportunity to take these actions, and ignorance not (Stehr 2012). Yet this issue is complicated in the shale gas discourse. The knowledge continuum does not so much convey a quantitative increase – somebody knows more, somebody less (or its qualitative differentiation in various social actors) – as the degree of certainty of these statements. For example:

There is no certainty that extraction of gas from shale deposits will be profitable. The boss of PGNiG also warns that it is premature to give any estimates or forecasts concerning extraction. (*Rzeczpospolita*, 27 July 2010)

But thanks to unconventional gas deposits, especially those in shale, that could change. Because according to a report of the US Energy Information Agency (EIA) published in April this year, the *forecast resources of extraction of shale gas* in Poland are 5 billion cubic metres, and their market value exceeds tens of billions of dollars. *Except that these are estimates* not of geologists, but only of a consulting firm. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 18 July 2011)

According to the US Energy Information Agency, resources of shale gas are also present in Poland, and *may total 5.3 billion cubic metres*, the most in Europe. *For now these are theoretical estimates*, because the explorations for shale gas are only now taking place, the government stresses. But PiS wants to guarantee profits from shale exploitation now. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24 May 2011)

It is in fact already certain that Poland, and in particular Pomerania, is “sleeping” on vast resources of shale gas. Suffice it to say that if it was only Poland using the gas, the resources would be enough for approx. 300 years. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 October 2011)

The states close to the end of the continuum described as ignorance – and thus supposition, estimates, lack of facts – by no means constitute obstacles to taking actions. Uncertainty is treated as an intrinsic aspect of human activity, and actors referring to the unknown at the same time describe what is not yet known. This is a type of ignorance which Matthias Gross (2012), following Georg Simmel, calls specified ignorance. In communicative actions, actors refer to knowledge, constructing areas of ignorance, and also attributing specific resources of knowledge and ignorance to other actors. This is an element of negotiation concerning which actions must or should be taken. Presumptions suffice to initiate them and, regardless of the later effects, taking actions itself triggers a change. This type of action usually becomes the basis of making political capital.

Even if it turns out that the scale of extraction of gas is not large, it will improve Poland's situation. The investments begun now must be continued by the next governments. (*Fakt*, 11 June 2010)

For now these are only estimates. How much gas there really is in Polish shale will become clear in a few years after the explorations conducted by the biggest fuel companies in the USA and Western Europe. Since 2007 the Ministry of the Environment has already issued 85 concessions for searching for shale gas. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 18 May 2011)

It is not known how much gas there is in Polish shale and whether exploitation of deposits will pay. But PiS wants to inscribe in the law now a provision that the state budget will receive 40 percent of income from sales of gas. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24 May 2011)

The discourse even includes the position that these changes should be preceded by actions taken on the basis of incomplete/dubious knowledge, in order to make competition possible.

Today models are needed. The law should precede investments, and not straggle behind them. It is time to think about who we want to base our business model on. Do we want in future to earn as much on gas as the Canadians, as much as the Norwegians, or perhaps as much as the Americans? The comfortable moment when we have hard data allowing precise calculations to be made will come only when the Ministry of the Environment receives the results of gas explorations conducted by private investors. If we were to wait till then, that would mean that only in 4–5 years' time would financiers and lawyers set about writing the strategies for managing this good. This will potentially be a huge financial conflict. Yet it looks as if our strategists will be joining a game that is already underway. They will no longer be able to play the gambit deciding on its subsequent course. (*Polityka*, 1 June 2011)

In the economic discourse, the financial and political risk and the constructed area of uncertainty, juxtaposed with enthusiastic visions of future gains, opportunities and possibilities, means that the shale gas extraction technologies can be defined as innovations, which therefore provides a basis for favourable financial regulations (Wagner 2014). This is an example

of strategic use of ignorance, in which the actor makes deliberate use of its resources in order to attain specific objectives (McGoey 2012). Understanding knowledge and ignorance as lying at the foundations of human actions directs attention towards the concepts of risk and uncertainty (Wagner 2014). Gross defines the differences between them as follows: risk is an undesirable possibility that we can foresee; uncertainty, meanwhile, is an undesirable possibility that cannot be foreseen at a given point (Gross 2010). Estimations of risk often involve its quantification – they not only require knowledge and awareness of its gaps, but when actions are taken they entail readiness to expose oneself to specific threats, whereas in the case of uncertainty potential threats cannot be foreseen until they occur (Tannert et al. 2007). It is impossible to prepare for them or accept them. There are two types of ignorance here: closed – when in uncertainty we reject and deny existing knowledge, choosing ignorance, or open – when we perceive the need to know more (Tannert et al. 2007). Both types of ignorance are articulated in the discourse, but with differing aims. Closed ignorance is connected to arguments for abandoning the explorations and exploitation of shale. Owing to the marginalisation of this position in the discourse, this type of ignorance also appears relatively seldom. Open ignorance is also cited by proponents of shale gas – experts in science making tentative attempts to cool the excessive and premature enthusiasm, economic experts stressing the significance and essence of the risk associated with investment in shale gas, and finally business representatives themselves, emphasising the high degree of uncertainty of the field and seeking additional support for their actions from the political community.

Conceptualisations of risk

The most common connotations of the concept of risk in the discourse are those referring to the economy. Above all, the media articulate the financial risk borne by investors owing to the uncertain profitability of exploitation of deposits, as well as the political risk associated with the unpredictability of political decisions made on the basis of criteria other than rational analysis of costs/gains. Part of this perception of risk is instability of the legal setting and the insufficient pace of adaptation of regulations to the new challenges that shale gas exploitation brings. The next dimension of economic-political risk is the controversies over shale gas played out in the international arena, and particularly in EU regulations. This is rather an area of uncertainty than one of risk – in the initial phase of development of the discourse it is hard to

predict the position of European institutions and the restrictions that they will impose on member states.

Therefore, although the area of the unknown concerning the profitability of exploitation of deposits seems to be expressed in the language of risk (i.e. a language of numbers giving estimates, likelihood and financial calculations), political factors affect the interpretations of issues of extraction in terms of uncertainty – of the unpredictable political and geopolitical circumstances.

The next threat in terms of exposure is the energy dependence on another country, especially Russia.³ The uncertainty associated with Moscow's unpredictable international policy and the recognised risk incurred by a potential block on gas supplies or unfavourable purchase conditions act in the media space as something of a counterbalance to the marginalised actions of the shale gas opposition.

The question of dangers to the environment is seldom discussed, and the risk to human health caused by fracking more rarely still. The problem of industrialisation of rural areas does not exist in the media discourse, and where topics of social risk do arise, they are relatively weak, and reduced to potential conflicts between the investor and residents. The issue of distribution of possible risks and benefits between social actors is also not covered in the media.

References to seismic activity, water pollution or uncontrolled gas emissions are lacking. Risk is perceived as directly linked to human activity. To a great extent this is the risk of incorrect assumptions in relation to the actual state (size of deposits, conditions of exploitation), as well as connected with the unpredictable actions of other actors (social, political risk). Strategic decisions are made with awareness of incomplete or unconfirmed (hypothetical) knowledge and under time pressure. Speed of action here is a condition for obtaining the market advantage, while scientific knowledge gained through research provides only estimates which must be confirmed in companies' operational activity. Therefore, it is only the practice that is the consequence of decisions that can verify their pertinence.

As mentioned above, the knowledge leading to decisions on exploration and exploitation of shale gas requires verification. The resources of theoretical knowledge are insufficient to eliminate the investment risk (also environmental, although this is discussed much less frequently). This practice has now become the domain of economic entities, rather than scientific research institutions:

Until the companies complete the exploration, we will not know what the actual reserves of shale gas in Poland might be and how many of them can be exploited profitably. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 March 2011)

3 The presence of Russia appears in various contexts, and it is therefore coded in terms of both conceptualisation of risk and economic or political conflict.

And let's not forget that the technology for extracting gas from shale is experimental. Nobody has done it yet over a longer period, so what will really happen underground is to a great extent still theory. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23 March 2011)

What did the miners' representatives say? That everything is super-safe. Except that they don't have any proof. (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23 March 2011)

We can observe a significant difference concerning the perceived field of uncertainty between the position represented by professionals and decision makers and that attributed to the protesting members of the local community. The igloo of uncertainty model developed by Tannert et al. (2007) can act as a basis for mapping the differences in the positions that actors in the discourse occupy regarding knowledge and ignorance.

The position most frequently represented by politicians – especially the government and above all the prime minister – corresponds most to the position of “closed knowledge” – “we know enough to make decisions on the future.” This enthusiastic position, geared towards gathering social support capital, does not fully match the positions held by the institutions from which this knowledge comes. Experts occupying positions of knowledge mostly concentrate on “what we do not yet know,” and less often on “what needs to be learnt.” They make a kind of estimate of the potential risks, which, as we have seen, are political and economic risks. In the technological field we observe what Piotr Stankiewicz (2009) has called a “strategy of declared safety” as a strategy for lessening conflict by reducing it to its market dimension.

The dominant actors in the discourse usually couch the positions assigned to members of the local community in terms of ignorance. On the sporadic occasions when local community voices are quoted (often under the influence of *Gasland*, and its criticism of shale gas extraction), the state of awareness present corresponds to “open ignorance,” whereby the ignorance comes with the strong belief that in order to make a rational decision it is necessary to “know more.” Only then can the perceived danger be transformed into acceptable or inevitable risk.

Law

A large proportion of social actors' statements concern issues of legal regulations. The dynamic of the legislative process is linked to that of the discourse in the sense that media interest is piqued by any new bill, agreement or entry into force of regulations and the surrounding circumstances. From the beginning, the law is treated as a framework shaping the possibilities and extent of investors' activities. This perspective of the relationship between the law

and the economy is certainly at the forefront of the discourse. It is treated as one of the factors with an impact on the bill's economic effectiveness. This is also the perspective from which the actions of ruling politicians are judged: on the one hand they make declarations concerning the preparation of regulations which will above all facilitate the actions of representatives of business, while on the other they are criticised for sluggishness and incompetence. It is worth noting that economic topics are usually connected to issues of domestic law, whereas environmental matters tend to refer to EU regulations.

It is hard to find another group of actors whose perception of extraction law has comparable media exposure. In comparison to the German media, for example, which frequently raise the question of cautious regulations safeguarding the interests of the community and environmental safety, in the Polish discourse there is in fact no reference to a law protecting the interests of shale gas opposition groups. On the whole, the law as a guarantor of citizens' safety functions only in the form of generalised references.

It appears more frequently as a tool of domination, for example in the few descriptions of the Żurawłów protest, where the corporation's argument that it is acting in accordance with binding civil law is confronted with natural law, the right to land and to the legacy of future generations. The law is also often presented as a tool of pressure from the European Union. It is referred to by the marginalised actors of environmental civic movements, which invoke it as a safeguard from the individual interests of global corporations and local politicians.

The dominant actors usually treat the law incorporated in the shale gas discourse as a tool to enable them to act in a way favourable to their interests, and essentially protecting above all those of the elites. From this point of view, it is viewed as "friendly" to investors or a "barrier" to realisation of economic interests, often identified with those of the state.

The media as a space of deliberation: exclusion and inclusion mechanisms

The characteristics of the shale gas discourse we have observed seem to fit the concept of "post-normal science" proposed by Silvio Funtowicz and Jerome Ravetz in 1991. This envisages situations in which facts are uncertain, values debatable, the stakes high and decisions urgent (Funtowicz,

Ravetz 1991; 1992). Despite the gaps in the available knowledge and the high level of uncertainty, it is necessary to make a quick decision on what to do. The way in which the discourse on shale gas in Poland has progressed seems to go beyond the field that the authors' model refers to as professional consultation. The areas of risk surpass the competences of experts, the risk itself is unquantifiable, and the existing methods for solving problems prove to be inadequate (Funtowicz, Ravetz 1991: 5). The authors therefore propose widespread deliberation and participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process. We cannot find any traces of such an approach in the media discourse. The members of the community are treated as passive recipients of actions and decisions and are not properly represented in the discourse. Efforts to incorporate into the discussion forms that the authors point to as possible alternative knowledge resources – collective wisdom, “real-life” examples, neighbourhood stories, secret documents or the result of journalistic investigations – are extremely rare. Where do they occur, as with *Gasland*, they are denied validity, and their objectivity, rationality or instrumental intentions and ideological obstinacy are questioned. The media as broadcasters do not undertake to promote active civic deliberation, stimulate dialogue, or organise a space for exchange of arguments.

The question of whether the media constitute a space of deliberation concerning shale gas is a question of the vision of the public space that they pursue, to whom they provide visibility and who is lacking in this space. Further questions are how the mutual relations of actors present in the discursive worlds are arranged, which actions are presented and how they gain legitimisation. Finally, how are actors' positions built and what strategies do they employ to be present in the communicative space and to make the meanings of their world common meanings.

The first and most obvious exclusion mechanism is omission and absence. Some social actors do not appear at all in the shale gas discourse, while others do very seldom. Although in the former case it is difficult to say whether the reasons for the lack of certain communities active in the media discourse of other countries (artists, religious organisations, industry associations, e.g. farmers) is a lack of interest or rather intentional omission, we can certainly observe large disproportions between the actors present in the discourse. The quantitatively lower presence of actors associated with the third sector, including especially representatives of environmental NGOs, social movements, local associations and groups involved in strategic regional development (e.g. local action groups), along with the marginal presence of local government politicians, scientists representing research institutions, and finally residents, is an evident exclusion mechanism. The communicative public sphere, subject to and in fact limited to the perspectives of the worlds of economics and politics, not only excludes widespread deliberation,

but even restricts debate within symbolic elites. The consequence of this is inter-systemic communication (politics–economics) aiming to form a favourable environment or political decisions geared towards reproduction of power and profit-centred economic actions. This communication is closed within the sphere of macropolitics and macroeconomics, and far removed from the lifeworld of residents. The buzzwords of public consultations and public dialogue are usually no more than a political game either targeted at legitimising decisions or used as a political weapon (when political opponents are accused of a lack of dialogue or conducting consultations improperly).

We found no information or reports in the media on organised dialogue meetings. Common, on the other hand, were references to scientific or industry/business conferences on shale gas. There is a lack of materials supporting civic participation, and showing how to be included in dialogue and what residents have the right to expect. The media make no effort to increase the number of actors involved in the discourse or to identify excluded voices and standpoints.

Actors representing environmental organisations are presented differently from business actors or politicians. The main difference is that they are less likely to be directly supported by people to whom the media convey expert status. They sometimes cite experts' views, but in this situation they play the role of background actors, with positions, views and knowledge being attributed to them. NGOs appear more frequently as collective actors or together as "environmentalists." On the radio and television they are presented in the field, often in everyday situations and informal dress. Their statements are emotional and close to colloquial language. The media often contrast them with a clinical, rational expert discourse with politicians and business representatives sitting in studios and the experts who support them. The latter group are given importance by the formal situation, their dress, and academic and professional titles (director, president, expert), and the virtue of objectivity is suggested by their theoretical or practical, specialist knowledge. Such titles tend not to be used for environmentalists and activists (with some exceptions), who are instead described with reference to the organisations to which they belong. They are perceived from the perspective of their personal engagement, which on the one hand makes them more persuasive, but on the other removes their objectivity. Although activists are much closer to the everyday world, in the media space the imbalance of positions is underlined. The reason for this is probably the model of the public sphere attached to the current media discourse – prioritising of elites, hard economic data, legitimisation of positions through expert knowledge. The partners for journalists organising the discourse are said besuited guests sitting in a studio, holding a discussion close to the analyti-

cal style. Actors who are usually quoted in snapshot reports do not have the opportunity for active participation in the discussion, while what they say is commented upon by other, privileged actors. The activists shown in the field inspire sympathy, but do not convince us of their arguments at the level of state policy.

A similar mechanism is at play with residents representing local communities. Here the workings of exclusion mechanisms are demonstrated more starkly as they are assigned specific interests, motivations and ignorance. These actors function as illustrations of the point of view of the “ordinary person,” a construct which is objective in nature – on the one hand legitimising the media themselves as representatives of citizens and a public opinion forum, and on the other managing the discourse by assigning specific positions to actors who are actually excluded from it.

A further exclusion mechanism concerns specific arguments. The most visible one is attributing the arguments increasing the possible environmental harmfulness to unspecified “opponents,” which sometimes means local oppositions and other times the European environmental lobby. Their positions are contrasted with the *raison d'état* of the Polish state, i.e. energy independence and economic security. A further argument is placing the position of Russia, and specifically Gazprom and its interests threatened by shale gas, on the same side of the line.

The next exclusion mechanism is the strategy of overlooking specific arguments and a kind of semantic shift entailing treatment of certain issues as primary and others as insignificant or marginal. An example might be a scene in an interview given by Deputy Prime Minister Janusz Piechociński, who, asked about the role of green energy, responded, “As regards Polish energy, our main intention is to develop coal...”

Although the Polish media note the opposition of environmentalists to the exploitation of shale gas, this is not linked to an extensive discussion on the reasons for this protest. They also accentuate the protests over other environmental investments, which might lead to the belief that environmentalists protest always and about everything.

The media lack any awareness of social dialogue – which tools it uses, what its expectations are linked to and what are or should be its consequences. The very idea of dialogue appears in the context of the failed investment in Żurawów, which has become an example of incapacity to reach an agreement between an investor and the community.

Although the media play an important role as distributors of information about what is currently happening with the shale gas project in the public sphere, it is hard to observe any intentional actions in favour of broader deliberation. Journalists are more likely to adopt the role of observers rather than activators of social engagement.

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